

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



News Release

Midwest Region

External Affairs Office

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Midwest Region National Wildlife Refuges Reduce Staff to Offset Increases in Personnel and Operational Costs

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Midwest Regional Office announced today a plan to reduce staffing at the Region's national wildlife refuges by 71 positions, approximately 20 percent of its workforce over the next three years. The personnel reductions are the result of nationwide budget shortfalls in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of federal lands in the world dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation. The Midwest Region National Wildlife Refuge System covers eight states and includes 54 national wildlife refuges, 12 wetland management districts and more than one million acres of public land and water.

Since fiscal year 2004, the Midwest Regional Refuge System budget has remained relatively static. At the same time, personnel costs have increased an average of five percent annually. Operational costs, such as fuel, equipment and other expenses have also increased. To offset these rising costs, the Region has already left 35 positions vacant and will reduce staff by an additional 36 positions -- to reach the total of 71 positions -- over the next three years.

The losses will occur in each of the eight states in the Midwest Region. Minnesota will take the largest loss with a reduction of 27 full-time positions. Wisconsin will lose 10 positions, Illinois will lose nine, Iowa will lose eight, Indiana and Missouri will each lose six, Michigan will lose four and Ohio will lose one position. Once these reductions are completed two refuges in Minnesota, Hamden Slough and Crane Meadows, will no longer have staff on-site.

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“The Region has developed a plan to focus our current budget toward areas that produce the maximum habitat and visitor use benefits,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director Robyn Thorson. “But make no mistake, some hard decisions will have to be made and some important work will not get done.”

“The National Wildlife Refuge System has always operated with fewer staff and less funding than any other federal land management agency,” said Regional Refuge System Chief Nita M. Fuller. “Now, faced with reducing our Refuge System field workforce by 20 percent, the National Wildlife Refuge System is forced to reduce wildlife and habitat management efforts, as well as services offered to the visiting public.”

Fuller stressed that while staff will be reduced by 71 positions, there is no plan to involuntarily remove any Refuge employees in the Midwest Region. “Our employees, along with our Friends groups and volunteers, are, and have always been, our most valuable assets. We’ve been doing more with less for some time. Now, however, we’ve reached a breaking point where we can no longer do more with less.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 96-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

For more information on the Midwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, visit our website at <http://midwest.fws.gov>

For more information on the Midwest Region Refuge Workforce Plan, visit our website at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/workforce>